

Recreation Opens at Another Everglades Water Quality Project

SFWMD treatment wetland provides ready access to nature for urban residents

West Palm Beach, FL – Although their primary job is to improve Everglades water quality, South Florida's massive, constructed treatment wetlands also offer numerous recreational opportunities for residents and tourists alike. The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) today opened the 6,562-acre Stormwater Treatment Area (STA) 1 East in southwestern Palm Beach County to the public for outdoor recreation.

"Recreational fishermen, hikers, bikers and residents of all ages can now take a little time away from their hurried lifestyles to enjoy a quiet day of nature at its finest," said SFWMD Governing Board member Patrick J. Rooney, Jr. "Making our public lands available for recreational use, when compatible with our ecosystem restoration mission, is an important goal of this agency."

STA-1 East is located approximately 10 miles west of State Road 7, making it the closest treatment wetland available for public recreation for residents of urban West Palm Beach and the western communities of Palm Beach County. The vast wetland site contains a public access point for hiking, biking, bird watching and nature photography.

The facility also features covered information kiosks, directional signs and paved parking areas, providing access to nature-seeking hikers and bicycle riders to explore and enjoy the vast, open marsh. This site is the first STA to have bank fishing allowed inside the levees. Fishing is a "catch and release" program. The recreation area will be open from dawn until dusk on Fridays through Mondays.

Stormwater treatment areas are large, constructed wetlands that improve the water quality of stormwater runoff before it enters the Everglades. The STAs contain aquatic plants that remove excess phosphorus, a nutrient that causes undesirable effects to the Everglades ecosystem, such as the uncontrolled growth of algae and invasive vegetation.

Combined with improved farming practices, South Florida's 52,000 acres of STAs have prevented more than 2,600 metric tons of phosphorus from entering the Everglades, reducing phosphorus loads by 70 percent since 1994. The STAs' vast treatment areas of wetland habitat have also encouraged the return of many native animal and bird species, often visible to recreational visitors.

For detailed information about recreational opportunities on District properties including the STAs, visit www.sfwmd.gov and follow the recreation link.